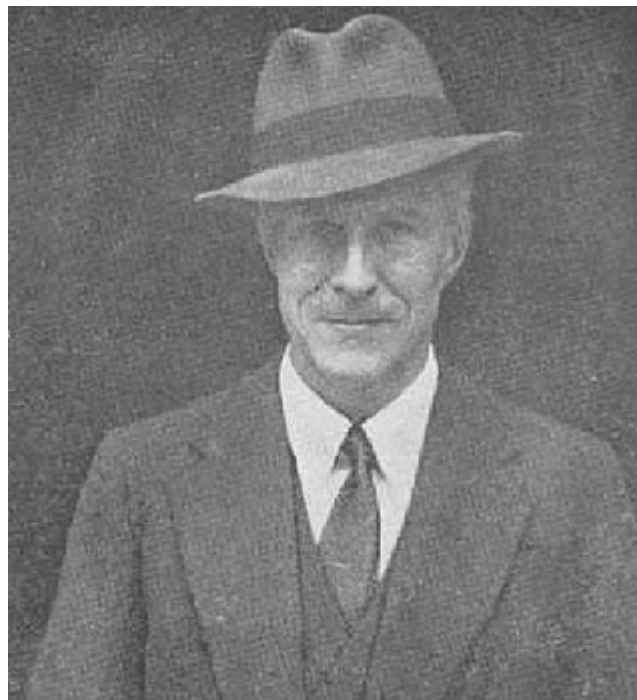


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*THE QUESTION OF
AERO-NAVAL BASES
IN URUGUAY
January 10, 1941*



E. MILLINGTON-DRAKE

Mr. Millington-Drake to Viscount Halifax.- (Received January 10, 1941)

(No. 331.)

My Lord,

Montevideo, December 5, 1940.

THE question of aero-naval bases in Uruguay for the use of the United States and/or other American States has now come to the end of what might be called its second phase, and can therefore be usefully reviewed as a whole.

2. The first phase, which was little more than a prologue, can perhaps best be indicated by the following synopsis according to date:-

April 30, 1940.- First denial by Uruguayan Ministry for Foreign Affairs of negotiations regarding bases.

June 18, 1940.- Arrest of ten Nazi leaders as a result of investigations by a parliamentary committee.

June 19, 1940.- Tentative negotiations opened between Uruguay, the United States and other Latin American countries.

June 23, 1940.- Speech by the United States Minister in Uruguay during a visit of United States cruiser Quincy, giving assurance that the United States would help in crushing un-American intervention on the American continent.

July 21-30, 1940.- Havana Conference, prior to which Nazi leaders had been temporarily released, it is believed under threat by German Government that it would otherwise break off relations.

August 1940.- United States naval and air force technicians visit Uruguay.

August 30, 1940.- First denial by United States Legation.

September 16, 1940.- Second denial by Uruguayan Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

September 24, 1940.- Uruguayan Military Mission leaves for the United States.

October 28, 1940.- Arrival back of Uruguayan Military Mission, head of which, according to reliable information, urged the Uruguayan Government to establish bases.

3. The second phase was opened in sensational form by the publication in Buenos Aires on the 10th November of an article by Mr. John White, the Montevideo correspondent of the New York Times, alleging that two secret United States envoys, whose names were given as Speers and Wooten, visited Montevideo in June last to ask for the cession of bases. The correspondent admitted, however, forward an alternative plan whereby they could become

available at need to all American nations, without Uruguayan sovereignty being thereby infringed.

4. The publication of this article was speedily followed by denials both from the United States Legation and the Uruguayan Ministry for Foreign Affairs that any form of agreement had been reached, though the latter admitted the existence of negotiations on the lines mentioned. Meanwhile the “Herrerista” paper, *The Debate*, whose strongest suit has been violent opposition to the United States, in a series of wholesale condemnations of the “Yankee menace”. It was, press, including the Opposition papers, heartily endorsed the Government’s decision. In this they were seconded by the Argentine papers, the *Prensa* and the *Nación*, which from the very first took the announcement in the best spirit, though justifiably concerned about the domination of the River Plate channel to Buenos Aires entailed by the construction of bases on the Uruguayan coast.

5. At this point a special meeting of the Cabinet, summoned on the 14th November, heard with unanimous approval a statement by Dr. Guani on the present state of the negotiations, but a further sensation was to be caused the following day by the announcement of the resignation of the Minister of Public Instruction, Dr. Toribio Olasso, who was the holder of one of the three Ministries which, by the present Constitution, are the prerogative of the “Herrerista” that the bases were undesirable, and it is significant that it was not followed by Arteaga, Minister of Public Works, and Dr. Gervasio Posadas Belgrano, Minister of Industry, who are personally strongly pro-British, the former by family tradition, and the latter because he was a pupil at the British schools, a fact which may prove most valuable in the difficult months to come.

6. Meanwhile, as reported in my telegram No. 344, President Baldomir, stirred into energetic action by this latest “Herrerista” interference in foreign policy, on the 17th November made for the first time a fighting speech in the provinces, in which he roundly accused the latter of using the present Constitution as a cloak for political sectarianism, and of being the only obstructionists to a universally-felt desire for its reform. It was widely reproduced and approved, and did much to win back the popularity that the President, through his seeming inertia in this and other matters, had already in some degree lost.

7. The President’s statements were speedily re-echoed by the Minister for place during a crowded session on the 21st November. This interpellation had been voted on the 12th November by the “Herrerista” party, who are constitutionally the holders of half the seats in the Senate, this being the quid

pro quo Dr. Herrera, a pro-German in the las was, has lately come under strong Nazi influence, and recently made a much criticised journey to Brazil, in order to contacts were taking place under the auspices of President Vargas, but whatever brought them to President Baldomir's notice. It is largely as a means to these and other political ends that Dr. Herrera has so strongly opposed political or commercial co-operation with the United States.

8. The occasion in the Senate was notable for some outspoken criticism, both by Dr. Guani and his "Herrerista" opponents. The accusations of political sectarianism and abuse of constitutional privilege which he brought against the latter at the close of his speech were identical with those of the "Herrerista" opposition generally. Dr. Guani pointed out that his Ministry had already issued denials on three occasions that any agreements on bases had been concluded, while the rumours to that effect by the Montevideo correspondent of the New York Times had also been officially denied by the United States Under-Secretary of State in Washington. The Government programme was for the construction, upkeep, direction and fiscalisation, by Uruguayan authorities only, of any bases which might be necessary. They would only be put at the disposal of foreign American countries if the security of the continent was threatened, in accordance with the resolutions of the Havan Conference. In reply to Senator Haedo, who observed that the Act of Havana had not been ratified by the Uruguayan Parliament, so that its provisions were not yet binding on the country, Dr. Guani said that the third declaration of the Lima Conference of 1938 established the solidarity of all the American countries if any one of them was the victim of aggression.

9. He then went on to say that on the 19th June the United States Government had opened tentative negotiations in order to prepare schemes for local defense, and ultimately a more extensive scheme of combined action for defence, and ultimately a more extensive scheme of combined action for continental defence. I would here recall that on the 23rd June the United States cruiser Quincy, which had just arrived in Montevideo, made a remarkable speech, in which he, in fact, reaffirmed the Monroe doctrine by declaring that the United States were prepared to give all possible co-operation should the sovereignty of the Latin American States be seriously threatened by a non-American Power.

10. With these ends in view, Dr. Guani continued, the United States Government had made enquires as to Uruguay's views on the following questions in the event of such aggression:-

(i) What would Uruguay do to defend herself? and

(ii) What, in general terms, was the aid they would wish to receive in the event of such an aggression?

To this the Uruguayan Government had replied that the combined army and police forces of the country were quite inadequate (actually some 14,000 men), and that they would ask for all the help necessary to repel invasion. The Government were then further asked-

(iii) If it would be ready to provide the necessary sea, land and air bases, means of communication, and other facilities necessary to make such help effective.

(iv) If the United States send aid to other American republics, would Uruguay guarantee to put its existing sea and air ports at the disposal of the United States, if necessary, and accord them the right of search of foreign merchant ships?

To these last two queries the reply was that all such military aid must depend on a request for help by the Uruguayan Government, must be of a purely provisional nature, and that the Government, in deference to national feeling, would not admit of any act which would constitute an infringement of their sovereign rights. To a final question as to whether the Uruguayan Government would agree to staff conferences, an affirmative answer was given.

11. In reply to Dr. Guani, Senator Haedo strongly criticised the individualism of his policy, which he alleged often lacked parliamentary and even Cabinet approval. He argued that bases costing approximately £20 million would be quite beyond Uruguay's means, and would permanently commit her the country granting the necessary loan. For all her good neighbourliness, the United States had broken off negotiations for a trade treaty with both Uruguay and Argentina. The cleverness of Señor Haedo's attack was further seen when, fully conscious of popular faith and hope in Great Britain at the present time, he maintained that, if the latter won the present war, there would be too occupied in Europe to think of America. And, even if they did attempt to attack the American continent, they would have to face first the British fleet, which had announced its intention never to surrender; secondly the United States fleet; and lastly the united navies of Argentina and Brazil. In the same way Japan could not constitute a menace to America, as she also would have to face the navies of the world, including that of Chile. Instead, therefore, of concentrating on armaments, Uruguay would be better employed in developing her own industries and public works. Other Senators, including Dr. Herrera, made bitter attacks in the United States, from which Dr. Guani formally dissociated his

ministry.

12. Finally, at 1 o'clock in the morning, the following motion was proposed and approved by 25 votes out of 26:-

“Having heard the statement of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Senate declares that in no case can it approve treaties or agreements authorising the establishment in Uruguay territory of naval or air bases which would in any way be a cause of servitude to the nation or detract from the sovereignty of the State.”

13. This motion was, in effect, what Dr. Guani had declared, a point which was emphasised later by the President of the Republic, and it was therefore perhaps unfortunate that the former had concluded his statement with a repetition of the President's accusations against the “Herreristas”, since it so happens that the “Colorado” Senators are not personally well disposed to him, and immediately resented his attack as being on the Senate as a whole. An additional motion, expressing the Senate's extreme displeasure at his imputations, was therefore passed by 20 votes to 6.

14. However, President Baldomir, nothing daunted by the result of the interpellation, promptly declared that he would renew the “Herrerista” challenge, as nothing had occurred to make him modify his views. In this he had 26th November, which, though still nominally an Opposition organ, has been abbreviated translation, pointing out the vital interests of Argentina, and declaring that United States aid should be limited to such material as she and Uruguay jointly could not provide, is enclosed with this despatch.

15. Furthermore, a proposal by the leading Socialist Deputy, Señor Frugoni, for a new interpellation of the Minister of Defence in the Chamber, was rejected on the 25th November by a large majority, as the “Herreristas” abstained from Government in the forthcoming session. However, the question was again raised in Parliament on the 27th November, when General Roletti, the Minister of Deputies again to explain the situation in detail on behalf of the Government, and doubtless to show their appreciation that the Chamber had rejected a motion of interpellation prior to that in the Senate.

16. General Roletti, who spoke first, stated that, following the Havana Conference, an exchange of views had taken place between military technicians exactly similar to one submitted to the Argentine General Staff. He was Uruguayan naval authorities had agreed, within a Pan-American scheme for the information, and also to grant port facilities. He then confirmed that the quarters, but had not yet received any concrete replies. The United States had

range sea-planes and six bombing sea-planes. It was clear that Uruguay could not repel a large-scale attack with such forces, and it was equally clear that she not becoming to her dignity as a sovereign nation to make no contribution to the General Roletti concluded by assuring the Chamber that her question of base, and improvements at Montevideo and the construction of a big airfield at Carrasco would be more than sufficient, as well as being abundantly justified commercially.

17. Dr. Guani then alluded to the suspicions voiced in the Senate regarding the Government's attitude to the problema, and again stated that the latter never would, directly or indirectly, compromise the sovereignty of the nation. Its policy was being conducted in consultation with the other American republics, and was in accordance with the resolutions of the various Pan-American conferences.

18. At the close of the session a "Herrerista" motion, declaring national feeling to be against the establishment of bases of any kind, whether financed by the Government or with aid from abroad, and claiming for the Legislature the incontestable constitutional right to make the final decision, was rejected by 57 votes out of 74. This was immediately followed by a motion proposed by "Colorado" section, which was then approved by 53 votes to 21. It read as follows:-

"The House of Representatives, having heard the statements of the honourable members of the Cabinet, expresses its most complete adhesion to the international policy pursued by the Government in the matters debated this afternoon, and is in agreement with the principles upheld by Uruguay at all recent international conferences, and also with the general principles of co-operation and American solidarity".

19. It will be noted that on this occasion Dr. Guani prudently abstained from attacking the "Herreristas" as he had done in the Senate, and his explanations, together with those of the General Roletti, caused general satisfaction to the Chamber. Indeed, the Government's alleged bad handling of the whole bases question amounts to no more than an unfortunate delay in informing Parliament of the tentative conversations with the United States. It was left to the President of the Republic to pursue the attack on the "Herreristas" in an interview which he gave on the 27th November to the Diario, the evening paper which has the largest circulation of any in Uruguay. His statement was virtually a synthesis of his own fighting speech at San José and of the statements of a synthesis of his own fighting speech at San José and of the statements of Dr. Guani and General Roletti in the Senate and Chamber.

Like the latter, he made a friendly reference to both Argentine and Brazil, and hinted that improvements to the natural harbour of Punta del Este would sooner or later have to be carried out as Uruguay's future "lay preferentially on the sea".

20. Since I have drafted the above despatch, I learn from a reliable source that the Uruguayan Government are on the point of obtaining from the United States Government a loan of 10 million dollars for the establishment of these bases, which is a relatively small one. It would therefore seem that the President and Dr. Guani have, in fact, been quite undeterred by the "Herrerista" attack on the remarkable admiration and belief in Britain at present prevailing, yet at the same time the cleverness and danger to them of the "Herrerista" attack lay in the subtle manner in which it endeavoured to turn their confidence to its own use, by arguing that there was much likelihood that a British victory would render the bases superfluous.

21. I have sent copy of this despatch to His Majesty's representatives at Washington and all Latin American posts.

I have, &c.
E. MILLINGTON-DRAKE.